

Our Calling – Part 3

I Peter 3:12

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO EXHIBIT
RIGHT BEHAVIOR – v. 8

It was on July 26, 1775 at a meeting in Philadelphia that the second Continental Congress voted on the establishment of the post office. They agreed "...that a postmaster general be appointed for the United States, who shall hold his office in Philadelphia, and shall be allowed a salary of \$1,000 annually..."

So began the birth of the post office, which is the second oldest department or agency of the present United States of America. The postal system was created to help bind a weak confederation of states together, support the growth of commerce, and ensure a free flow of ideas and information. Today, the Postal Service helps to fuel the nation's economy delivering hundreds of millions of messages and billions of dollars in financial transactions each to some eight million businesses and 250 million Americans. That's a lot of mail.

In 1825 a new department within the Post Office was created, which over the years has been given various names. It was known in the beginning as the dead letter office and dealt with all the undeliverable mail, mail with invalid address and no return address. By 1835 it was handling 20,000 undeliverable items every day. By 2006 that number swelled to 90 million undeliverable items.

You might be wondering what happens to all that undeliverable mail. This is a rare instance in which postal workers are authorized to search the contents to determine any clues either to who sent it or where it might be going. Letters are usually destroyed while articles of value are auctioned off.

You may yet receive that Christmas fruit cake from Aunt Martha.

We have taken a couple weeks to discuss the Christian's call from I Peter 3:8-12.

From verse 8 we discussed the Christian's call to exhibit right behavior and considered the five overarching virtues that should be displayed in the life of the Christian in regard to our relationships with other Christians and relationships with non-Christians.

We are to live harmoniously.

We are to live sympathetically.

We are to live lovingly.

We are to live compassionately.

We are to live humbly.

Two weeks ago we looked at verses 9-11 and considered the Christian's call to experience right blessings.

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO EXPERIENCE
RIGHT BLESSINGS –
v. 9-11

In that passage there is a negative injunction.

Don't repay evil with evil manners.

Don't reply to insults with an insulting mouth.

We also considered a positive inheritance, the blessing we not only receive but are to give to those who insult us or do evil to us.

We are to tame our tongue.

We are to turn our path.

Practice what is moral.

Pursue what is peaceful.

Last week I hope you learned what it means to carry stretchers.

As we come to verse 12 we want to consider from this passage the Christian's call to examine right benevolence.

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO EXAMINE
RIGHT BENEVOLENCE – v. 12

Now right away let me be clear as we begin to consider this verse that we are not referring to our benevolence toward others as an act of kindness toward them, but rather God's benevolence toward us, especially in regard to our prayers.

From our verse we will look at these three points.
 God's favor is expressed
 God's faithfulness is experienced
 God's fierceness is evident

In verses 10-12 Peter is quoting from Psalm 34:12-16. In that Psalm, like many others, we find that David once again pauses to give God thanks for deliverance from his enemies. To get the background for this Psalm we need to look at the event that prompted him to write and why Peter used this particular passage in his letter.
 I Samuel 21:1-22:1

David is on the run from Saul who was hunting him down to murder him out of jealousy. He went to Ahimelech the priest and got the sword that belonged to Goliath. David fled to the Philistine territory of Gath to escape Saul.

He jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire as they say.

What do we know about Gath? They were an enemy of Israel.

Who do we know that was from Gath? Goliath
 What does David have with him? Goliath's sword
 What was he thinking?

This whole chapter is really about a lapse of faith on David's part. He wasn't trusting God at all, but his own understanding.

In order to escape he pretended to be insane. 22:1 says he went to Adullam which had many caves throughout its very rugged terrain.

As David reflects on this event he can't help but sit down and pen a psalm of remembrance and praise for God's deliverance and invites others to join him.

One author noted that "after affirming that God is

good to those who trust Him, he instructed the people on how to live a long life."

In running to the enemy, David was out of the will of God. David had been anointed by Samuel as the next king that came with a promise from God. But instead of trusting God for protection he chose to trust his own instincts and he ran from one trouble right into the hands of another. Eventually he realized and reaffirmed his trust in God.

Peter uses this Psalm as a reminder to believers who were living in a time of widespread persecution that they could trust the Lord. He gives three reasons why God can be trusted, but that trust comes with responsibility on the part of the believer. We first see that God's favor is expressed.

A. God's Favor Is Expressed – v. 12a

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous."

Here and in the other two points we see that God is described as having physical characteristics. It's a figure of speech we call that an anthropomorphism. It's a way for us to better understand God's nature.

In this first instance we notice that God is described as having eyes. Now we understand from John 4:24 that God is a Spirit and so wouldn't have physical eyes. It's a way for us to understand that God sees everything that is happening. Nothing escapes His notice.

Psalm 139:1-8

Jeremiah 23:24 "Can any hide himself in secret places?" sayeth the Lord. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' sayeth the Lord."

Proverbs 5:21 "For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and He examines all his paths."

Zechariah 4:10 speaks of God's eyes ranging throughout the earth.

He sees all that goes on.
 He saw the trouble David was in.
 He saw the trouble these believers in Asia Minor were in.
 He sees all the trouble you are in.

Now there is a sense in which we understand His all seeing eye to be on everyone. Not a person escapes His gaze, no matter how secret a place it may be where we try to hide. His penetrating eye catches everything every single person does.

But as Peter quotes this Psalm of David he is not referring to that aspect of God's all-seeing nature of everyone on the planet. Peter wants his readers to know that God's eye is especially on His people. Specifically he refers to this group as "the righteous." We can understand the righteous in one of two ways.

The first way is to consider the righteous as all those who by faith have trusted Christ as Savior. We have been given or been clothed with the righteousness of Christ the moment we trusted Christ as Savior. God no longer sees us as sinners but as saints through the righteousness of Christ. We sometimes refer to it as being clothed with His righteousness. This righteousness is in no way any goodness on our part but purely and wholly that of Christ. As Lewis Sperry Chafer writes "we become what Christ is at the moment of salvation."

II Corinthians 5:21 "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him (Christ) we might become the righteousness of God."

But as Peter uses the term "righteous" he is not referring to the general population of all believers. In the context of the passage, the righteous being referred to here means right behavior, not perfect behavior or a perfect nature, but striving to do what is right by following God's commands. While we are seen as righteous in God's eyes, we are still to practice righteousness in our conduct, those things

we talked about a couple weeks ago: living in harmony, living sympathetically, living lovingly, living compassionately, and living humbly; not repaying evil with evil or insult with insult. Paul talks elsewhere about conduct and attitudes that we are to discontinue while practicing conduct and displaying attitudes that are right.

That God has "eyes" to see emphasizes His ever watchful oversight and careful attention to His people's needs. It emphasizes the trust we can then have in God to provide for us while at the same time motivates us to godly living.

It also means that we are held accountable for our behavior. Because He sees everything we do in Matthew 16 Jesus speaks about every man being judged according to His deeds.

Righteous in this sense is not referring to absolute perfection, but rather in the sense that the righteous seek to live a godly life.

Both Zecharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist were considered righteous.

Both Joseph, the husband of Mary, mother of Jesus were considered righteous and in God's favor.

The righteous are the ones who make a deliberate effort to trust and obey God.

They seek to be holy - I Peter 1:15-16.

They seek to purify themselves - I John 3:3.

They are the ones who strive to turn from sin.

They are the ones who are displeased with what displeases God.

They are the ones on whom the eyes of the Lord are fixed. That is the first reason we can trust God. As you seek to live for Him, His eye is on you. He knows all about the struggles, trials, and hardships you are going through, nothing passes from His gaze. That His eye is on you means you are special.

Jesus knows all about our struggles;
 He will guide 'til the day is done:
 There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus:
 No, not one! no, not one!

Why should I feel discouraged and why should the shadows come?
 Why should my heart be lonely and long for heaven and home?
 When Jesus is my portion, a constant Friend is He,
 His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.
 His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.

I sing because I'm happy;
 I sing because I'm free;
 His eye is on the sparrow
 And I know He watches me.

In this we see God's favor expressed.

The second reason we can trust God is seen in the next statement.

God's faithfulness is experienced.

B. God's Faithfulness Is Experienced – v. 12b

“and His ears are attentive to their prayer.”

We learn expressly about this attribute of God from Lamentations 3:22-23 where we are told that His faithfulness is great in dispensing His mercy and compassion daily.

From I John 1:9 we understand that He is faithful to forgive sins.

Once again from the context of our passage we find out about God's faithfulness as it relates to the prayers of the righteous. He is attentive to their requests. He is observant and considerate of our prayers. This is a general term speaking of requests.

Return back once again to Psalm 34.
 He begins the psalm with a note of praise to God and with an invitation to other worshippers to join him in praise to God. Notice verse 2 where it says “let the afflicted hear and rejoice.”

Hear what?
 Why should the afflicted rejoice or lift their voices and hearts in praise? They're in trouble.

It is much like what Paul wrote when he told us to give thanks in all things because it is God's will.

V 4 – “I sought the Lord, and He answered me.”
 David was uttering an urgent prayer to God because he was being pursued by his enemies.
 What, then, was God's answer? Deliverance
 “He delivered me from all my fears.”

V 5 – “Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.” To that we could add their faces are never covered with fear or anxiety or doubt, even those who are in trouble because they look to Him. That's key. Look to Him.

V 6-9 – “This poor man cried and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing.”

V 17-19 “*The righteous* cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. *A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all*”

If you are going through some trials, if you have enemies pursuing you, if you feel haggard and worn out because of the battles you are facing, this Psalm, this promise is for you – God delivers from your

fears, and not just some of them, all of them. But it comes with complete trust in God as you cry out to Him. James writes that when we ask God for something we should not doubt.

“That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (vs. 7-8) and he continues in verse 12 to speak of persevering under trial having just written earlier in verse 4 that perseverance when it is finished brings maturity.

Now the idea Peter conveys in his letter is that these prayers are persistent. It is a continuous cry to the Lord, meaning you don't stop praying about it. God has guaranteed to hear the prayers of those who endeavor to live godly. He has not guaranteed to hear the prayers of the ungodly. As a matter of fact, I believe there is only one prayer the ungodly can utter that God will hear – “Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.”

Lord, I acknowledge I am lost.

Lord, I acknowledge that I need a Savior.

Lord, I acknowledge that there is nothing I can do to save myself.

Lord, I acknowledge that Christ died for my sin.

Lord, I trust Christ as my Savior right now.

That is the prayer He hears from the unbeliever.

This passage insinuates that even the prayer of a Christian who is living in sin will not be heard.

Psalm 66:18 “If I cherish sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

If you wonder why your prayers seem so empty as if they are ending up in the dead letter office of heaven maybe the prayer of David should be where you begin if you would have God hear and answer. Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Of this passage one author writes “examine me, see the integrity of my devotion and keep me true.”

If there is sin, reveal it so I can confess it.

Otherwise, keep my heart right with you, God, so my prayers will be heard and answered.

In James 5:16 we read that it is the prayer of a righteous person that is powerful and effective.

James gives another reason our prayers may not be answered. He speaks of the sin of wrong motives. “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 3:3)

So we come to our passage we have a better understanding in regard to what prayers God answers. He answers the prayers of those who seek to live right before Him. Psalm 66 has some good news to add to this. It's found in verse 19.

“But God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.” (v. 19)

God is listening to the prayer of the righteous.

He is ready to do them good.

He is ready to provide their needs.

We can freely ask.

James 3:2 reminds us that we don't have because we don't ask, but then, again, don't ask with the wrong motive. When we delight in God our desire is wanting what He wants and that is what we ask.

J. I. Packer concludes that prayer is a duty we owe God because it expresses our dependence on Him. So if we aren't praying we are essentially saying that we don't need God. We are declaring our independence from Him.

So folks, pray, and wait patiently because even for the righteous, prayer requires both persistence and patience.

Psalm 40:1 “I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry.”

Again, Packer writes “His eye is on you, although you do not see Him; His ear is open to your cry, even though at the moment He is not speaking to

you as you want.” His silence is not His absence. Keep praying, but pray in faith without wavering or doubting. *Faith is the platform on which prayer is built.* The prayer of faith spoken by the righteous believes in the God of the possible. Ephesians 3:20 “Now unto Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.”

The answered prayer of the righteous comes because that person has learned to live in Christ and allowed His Word to live in you. John 15:7 “If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

E. M. Bounds states “Awaiting the onset of our [persistence] and insistence is the Father’s heart, the Father’s hand, the Father’s infinite power, the Father’s infinite willingness to hear and to give to His children.”

God’s faithfulness is experienced when the righteous pray and we see His benevolence. Pursue a right relationship with Him so your prayers don’t end up in the dead letter office of heaven.

There is one final result in verse 12. If instead of living right before God, a person chooses to reject God, that person will see evidence of God’s fierceness.

C. God’s Fierceness Is Evident – v. 12c

“but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Our quote from Psalm 34 once again gives us a figure of speech referring to the face of God. That phrase speaks of God’s judgement on those who reject Him. Isaiah 53:6, Ezekiel 18:4, John 3:18, Romans 3:23, Hebrews 9:27; I John 5:11 and many others all have one thing in common – judgment, God’s wrath.

In Lamentations 4:16 we read about the Israelites that because of their constant rejection of God He scattered them and it says that He no longer had His eye on them.

And in Revelation 6:16 there is a sobering reminder of God’s face turned in judgment against the person who does evil. “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”

J. I. Packer says that “evil people do not resist sin or hate sin or worry that sin is hated by God.” Those who do evil do not fear His judgement.

Peter extracts from Psalm 34 a reminder to his hearers that there are two choices to make when facing persecution and trials. We can either respond with godly character and pursue Him in prayer, or we can choose to do evil. The one will experience God’s favor and faithfulness through answered prayer. The other will face God’s fierceness in judgment. Peter is calling for those who have chosen to do evil to reconsider their path and come to a place where they will experience God’s favor.

If you want your prayers to get answered, you need to have the right address. You need to be in a right relationship with God.

Are you walking with God today in a right way or is there something you need to confess?

If you have never begun a journey with the Lord, is today that day you choose to trust Christ and walk with Him?

The choice of experiencing His favor or His fierceness is up to you. Our calling is to live godly in Christ Jesus.